



Directorate of
Intelligence

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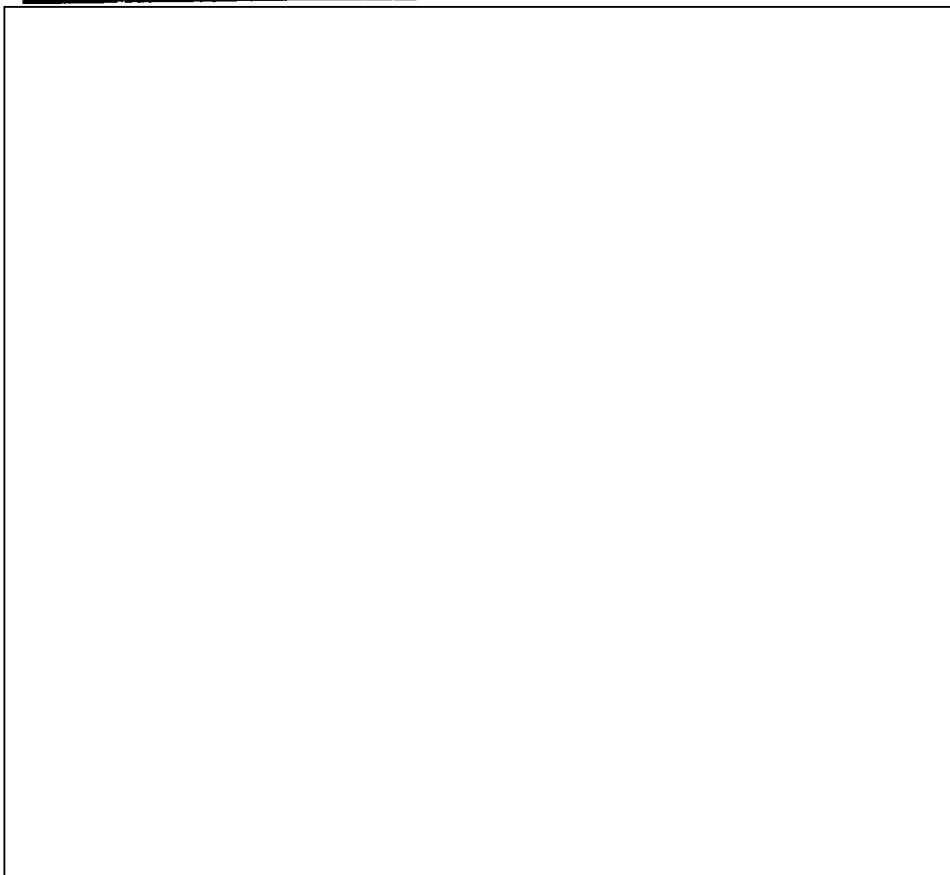
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FRANCE: INTERNATIONAL INSPECTION OF NUCLEAR TEST SITE

Australia has released the results of a multinational inspection of the French nuclear test site at Mururoa Atoll; the results support the judgment that the French have been extremely safety conscious in their underground nuclear testing operations.

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FRANCE: INTERNATIONAL INSPECTION OF NUCLEAR TEST SITE ☐

Australia has released the results of a multinational inspection of the French nuclear test site at Mururoa Atoll. France had invited scientists from New Zealand, Australia, and Papua New Guinea to tour the site late last year. The invitation was prompted by continuing charges by these countries of radioactive contamination of the environment resulting from French underground nuclear tests. ☐

The inspection team generally concluded that there was no evidence of any massive short-term release of particulate radioactive contaminants from current French underground tests. Although the team did find evidence of some venting of gaseous and volatile fission products at the time of the tests, these releases apparently were not of a magnitude that would pose a significant health hazard. The team also concluded that the geological integrity of Mururoa Atoll had been significantly impaired and the damage could result in radioactive leakage after 500 to 1,000 years. Australia's Foreign Minister Bill Hayden stated that the results of the study did not affect Australia's opposition to nuclear testing by any nation. ☐

Comment:

The French have been extremely safety conscious in their underground nuclear testing operations. We believe the conclusions of the inspection team are accurate. There is no evidence that any French underground nuclear test in the South Pacific has resulted in off-site contamination. An accident in 1979 resulted in some local contamination, but was the result of a chemical, rather than a nuclear, explosion. The contamination has been cleaned up, and was not detectable off site. ☐

Mururoa Atoll has been extensively damaged by nuclear testing, and the possibility of radioactive releases, although slight, is increasing. Both the coral and the volcanic substructure of Mururoa are becoming increasingly fractured, providing possible paths of escape for trapped highly radioactive debris. The French have taken two steps to alleviate the problem. ☐

☐ This step has increased significantly the safety of their operations, as well as greatly expanded the number of available test locations. ☐

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The French also are reactivating their underground test site at Fangataufa Atoll [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This step also should increase the safety of the test operations. [REDACTED]

Despite the Pacific Basin protests, it is unlikely that the French will stop conducting nuclear tests. It also seems unlikely that the report by the inspection team will mitigate the protests. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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